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About the USA – Virtual Classroom Newsletter for English Teachers

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National Poetry Month

April is the cruellest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

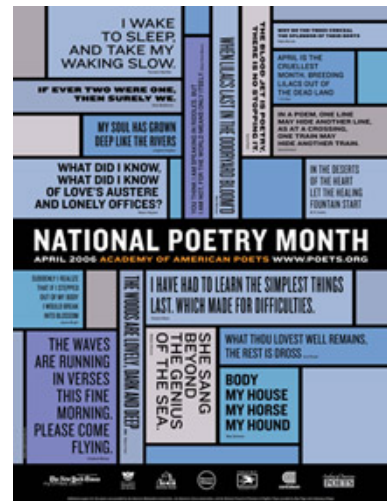
Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.

The Waste Land, T. S. Eliot (www.bartleby.com/201/1.html)

National Poetry Month was established by the Academy of American Poets as a month-long, national celebration of poetry in April 1996. The goal was to achieve an increase in the visibility, presence, and accessibility of poetry in American culture. National Poetry Month has grown over the years into the largest literary celebration in the world. Thousands of businesses and non-profit organizations participate through readings, festivals, book displays, workshops, and other events. In April 2006, the Academy of American Poets will launch the first-ever Poetry Read-a-Thon. Geared for middle school students (grades 5-8), the Read-a-Thon's goals are to celebrate the reading of poems and writing about poems. In addition to emphasizing the pleasure and fun of reading poetry,

As T. S. Eliot wrote, "*April is the cruellest month*" - the Academy of American Poets hopes that National Poetry Month lessens that effect. And in her poem "Spring", Edna St. Vincent Millay asked, "*To what purpose, April, do you return again?*" * For National Poetry Month, of course!
(*www.americanpoems.com/poets/ednamillay/7353)



www.poets.org

Started in 1996, Poets.org is the award-winning website of the Academy of American Poets.

Visitors can find hundreds of essays and interviews about poetry, biographies of more than 500 poets, over 1700 poems, and audio clips of 150 poems read by their authors or other poets.

about the USA

usa.usembassy.de

About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

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www.usembassy.de/germany/irc/

Contact: IRCBerlin@state.gov

The Poet Laureate - Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress

The Poet Laureate serves "as the nation's official lightning rod for the poetic impulse of Americans." During his or her term, the Poet Laureate seeks to raise the national consciousness to a greater appreciation of the reading and writing of poetry. The position has existed since 1937. Each Laureate brings a different emphasis to the position.

- <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/>



Poet Laureate Ted Kooser - American Life in Poetry

In April 2005, Librarian of Congress James H. Billington appointed Ted Kooser to serve a second term as Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry, during the same week that Kooser received the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his book, "Delights and Shadows" (2004). His weekly newspaper column, "American Life in Poetry," which features a brief poem by a contemporary American poet and a brief introduction to the poem by Kooser. It reaches approximately 1.5 million readers every week in more than 70 newspapers.

- <http://www.americanlifeinpoetry.org/>



Poetry 180 – A Poem a Day for American High Schools

Billy Collins, Poet Laureate between 2001-2003, introduced "Poetry 180" to help high school teachers make poetry an active part of the daily experience of American high school students. "Poetry 180" offers a poem for every day of the approximately 180-day school year. There was another reason, however, he chose this name. As he explained it, because, "A 180-degree turn implies a turning back -- in this case, to poetry."

- <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/>

Poetry Slams Rock Literary World



Staceyann Chin,
acclaimed slam
poet and star of

What is a concert without music? What is a game show without a game? What literary movement has swept the United States and much of the rest of the world over the last few years? These apparently unrelated questions have the same unlikely answer: poetry slams. The two words -- poetry and slam -- do not fit together easily. But Marc Kelly Smith, the founder of poetry slams, says, "It is the marriage of the art of performance with the art of poetry," with the added excitement of a competition. Slam venues across the United States share some general characteristics: poets sign up to read their works in a local coffee shop or bar or church basement in front of rowdy audiences that have been encouraged to cheer, applaud, whistle and boo. Backing up these spontaneous judgments is a panel of judges, who are picked at random from the audience a few minutes before a slam begins. These judges apportion points to each poet, assessing both style and substance, and, at the end of the evening, a winner is declared. Critics of slams --

and there are many -- complain that they glorify performance over content, attitude over the word. Slam advocates say that those that disdain them simply do not accept that literary judgments can be made by ordinary people who do not have academic titles. Smith says that audiences come for the poetry and unabashedly enjoy the performances. Slam poets may recite their poetry with the driving rhythms of rap artists, the histrionic flair of Shakespearean actors or the howl of the beat poet. There are some limits; they cannot sing or use music and they cannot use any kind of prop or costume to enhance their reading. It is the poet onstage in front of a microphone.

Smith, a construction worker at the time, organized the first poetry slam at a Chicago bar 20 years ago. The rock concert-like atmosphere projected the ironic, self-referential, and often angry style of the 1980s punk music scene. In more recent years, reflecting the cross-pollination of America's multicultural nature, delivery styles increasingly come from hip-hop culture, which began in the African-American community. The result is a dynamic artistic movement, with hundreds of poets participating in front of thousands of spectators each week.

<http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/Archive/2006/Mar/14-903695.html>

- **Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest**
<http://www.poetryoutloud.org/>
- **Poetry Slam International**
<http://www.poetryslam.com/>
- **Script Novels** (Jonathan Hunt. School Library Journal, March 1, 2006.)
<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6312744.html>
- **About the USA > Literature**
<http://usa.usembassy.de/arts-literature.htm>

Jazz and Poetry - Jazz Appreciation Month

April is Jazz Appreciation Month in the United States, and an occasion to explore the history of and current developments in the world of jazz. Created by African-Americans as a fusion of West African musical traits with European and folk elements and subsequently enriched by contributions from across the globe, jazz remains among America's prized contributions to world culture.

The musicality of words is an important element of poetry, and many poets carefully consider the sound of the words on the page. Nowhere perhaps is the relationship between music and words closer than in jazz poetry. Beginning with the birth of blues and jazz, jazz poetry can be seen as a thread that runs through the Harlem Renaissance, the Beat movement, and the Black Arts Movement. From early blues to free jazz to experimental music, jazz poets use their appreciation for the music as poetic inspiration. One of the most popular forms of American poetry, the blues poem stems from the African American oral tradition and the musical tradition of the blues. Not only the music but the artists make frequent appearances in jazz poetry: Louis Armstrong, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, Bessie Smith, and Lester Young are just some of the muses for jazz poetry.

But writing about jazz poetry is, as they say, like dancing about architecture. The form can be best understood through a few lines from the poets themselves:

*Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
I heard a Negro play.*

*Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
He did a lazy sway . . .
He did a lazy sway . . .*

To the tune o' those Weary Blues.

from [The Weary Blues](#), by Langston Hughes.

See: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5660>

Read more:

- **Jazz Appreciation Month Resources (Department of Education)**
<http://www.ed.gov/free/jazz.html>
- **About the USA > Music**
<http://usa.usembassy.de/arts-music.htm>

Soccer and Poetry

What the rest of the world calls football, is known as soccer in the United States. Soccer became extremely popular among young athletes in the 1990s. Registration for U.S. Youth Soccer Association teams has almost doubled since 1990-91.

Thanks to America SCORES, an innovative after-school program, thousands of urban kids are benefit from a combination of soccer and poetry classes to improve their scores both in the classroom and on the playground. America SCORES -- working with the U.S. Soccer Foundation -- has grown from its initial public school partnership in Washington, DC to serving over 3,000 public elementary school students in 12 major metropolitan areas across the United States. How does it work? America SCORES sets up a soccer league at a public school. Students who sign up for the league play soccer three days a week and get creative writing instruction the other two days from teachers who serve as writing and soccer coaches. The rules are simple. No poetry, no soccer. "The kids love it because poetry has no parameters, there's no judgment," says a representative of America SCORES. "It's the opposite of testing. The kids are motivated and encouraged to express their ideas and emotions when teachers have the freedom to say yes."

World Cup 2006

The U.S. Men's National Team has qualified for the World Cup 2006. After earlier appearances in 1930, 1934, and 1950. for the fifth consecutive time.

Find out more about the U.S. team at:

- <http://worldcup2006.usembassy.de/>
- <http://usa.usembassy.de/sports-soccer.htm>



Becca Pulliam,
National Public
Radio producer
(© Enid Farber)



Sheila Anderson,
radio host of the
Late Night Jazz broadcast
on station WBGO-FM
in Newark, New Jersey
(© Enid Farber)

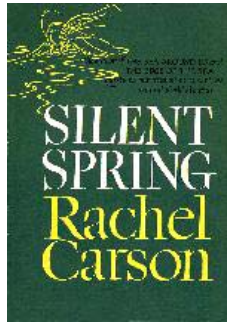
Upcoming Webchats

Find out more at:
[www.usembassy.de/
germany/chat.html](http://www.usembassy.de/germany/chat.html)



www.americascors.org/

Rachel Carson – Environmentalist, Biologist and Poet



"The winds, the sea, and the moving tides are what they are. If there is wonder and beauty and majesty in them, science will discover these qualities. If they are not there, science cannot create them. If there is poetry in my book about the sea, it is not because I deliberately put it there, but because no one could write truthfully about the sea and leave out the poetry."

[National Book Awards Acceptance Speech. Rachel Carson, Winner of the 1952 Nonfiction Award For *The Sea Around Us*](#)

Rachel Carson was born in a small rural Pennsylvania community. As a young child, Carson's consuming passions were the nature surrounding her hillside home and her writing. She was first "published" at the age of 10 in a children's magazine dedicated to the work of young writers. In 1925, Carson entered Pennsylvania College for Women as an English major determined to become a writer. Midway into her studies, however, she switched to biology. Her first book, *Under the Sea-Wind*, published in 1941, highlighted her unique ability to present deeply intricate scientific material in clear poetic language that could captivate her readers and pique their interest in the natural world. In 1951, Carson's second book, *The Sea Around Us*, was published and eventually translated into 32 languages. It was on The New York Times' best-seller list for 81 weeks and won a National Book Award. But she is most well-known for her last book, *Silent Spring*, published in 1962. In it, Carson documented in minute biological detail the menace to the ecosystem caused by pesticides. Her book provoked a firestorm of controversy as well as personal attacks on her professional integrity. The pesticide industry mounted a massive campaign to discredit her even though she did not urge the complete banning of pesticides but rather that research be conducted to ensure pesticides were used safely and alternatives to dangerous chemicals such as DDT be found. The federal government, however, ordered a complete review of its pesticide policy. Carson was asked to testify before a Congressional committee along with other witnesses. As a direct result of the study, DDT was banned. With the publication of *Silent Spring*, Carson is credited with launching the contemporary environmental movement and awakening concern by thinking Americans about the environment.

- **Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**
<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/rachelcarson/carsonbio.html>
- **The Time 100: The Most Important People of the Century – Rachel Carson**
<http://www.time.com/time/time100/scientist/profile/carson.html>
- **National Book Award Classics**
http://www.nationalbook.org/dirletter_rcarson.html

Earth Day and the Rise of Environmental Consciousness



Upcoming Webchat

Market Solutions to
Environmental
Problems, Terry
Anderson, April 13, 06

Find out more at:
[www.usembassy.de/
germany/chat.html](http://www.usembassy.de/germany/chat.html)

Earth Day, April 22, is the annual celebration of the environment and a time to assess the work still needed to protect the natural gifts of our planet. Earth Day is observed around the world, although nowhere is it a national holiday. Earth Day also has no central organizing force behind it although several non-governmental organizations work to keep track of the thousands of local events in schools and parks that mark the day. In the United States, Earth Day affirms that environmental awareness is part of the country's consciousness and that the idea of protecting the environment - once the province of a few conservationists - has moved from the extreme to the mainstream of American thought.

- **Earth Day**
http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/environment/earth_day.html
- **Protecting the Environment: 30 Years of U.S. Progress**
<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itgic/0605/ijge/ijge0605.htm>
- **About the USA > Holidays > Arbor Day/Earth Day**
<http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/hol/celebrate.pdf>
- **About the USA > Science & Technology > Environmental Technology**
<http://usa.usembassy.de/technology-environment.htm>
- **Earth Day Network**
<http://www.earthday.net/default.aspx>
- **EPA Earth Day**
<http://www.epa.gov/earthday/>

How To Become An American Citizen – Einbürgerung “auf Amerikanisch”

As a result of current discussions in Germany regarding the naturalization of immigrants, comparisons have been drawn to procedures in the United States. As part of the Department of Homeland Security, the Office of Citizenship is mandated by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to promote instruction and training on citizenship rights and responsibilities and to provide immigrants with information and tools necessary to successfully integrate into American civic culture. Its primary focus lies on providing information and resources to immigrants at two key points in their journey towards civic integration: when they first become permanent residents and when they are ready and eligible to begin the formal naturalization process.



- **Office of Citizenship**

- <http://uscis.gov/graphics/citizenship/index.htm>

- **Learn about the United States – Quick Civics Lessons (Flash Cards in various formats)**

Immigrants applying for naturalization can use these flash cards as a study tool to prepare for the naturalization test and teachers and volunteers can use these flash cards in the classroom.

- <http://uscis.gov/graphics/citizenship/flashcards/index.htm>

- **Welcome Guide for New Immigrants**

This comprehensive guide contains practical information to help immigrants settle into everyday life in the United States, as well as basic civics information that introduces new immigrants to the U.S. system of government. It also gives new immigrants tips on how to get involved in their new communities.

- <http://uscis.gov/graphics/citizenship/welcomeguide/index.htm>

- **Faces of America – A Tribute to Citizenship**

This video highlights the 230 years of America's history as a nation of immigrants. To view this video you must save the file directly to your computer using "right-click" and "Save As" on Windows systems (MPG, 35MB)

- <http://uscis.gov/graphics/publicaffairs/faces.htm> | Video: <http://uscis.gov/graphics/media/Faces.mpg>

- **Helping Immigrants Become New Americans**

A report on community efforts to promote immigrant integration. (September 2004)

- <http://uscis.gov/graphics/citizenship/focusgroup.pdf>

- **Background: About the USA > Society > A Nation of Immigrants**

- <http://usa.usembassy.de/society.htm>

- **Background: About the USA > Society > Census & Demographics**

- <http://usa.usembassy.de/society-demographics.htm>

- **Naturalizations in the U.S. 2004 (Office of Immigration Statistics)**

- <http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/publications/NaturalizationFlowReport2004.pdf>

100th Anniversary Of San Francisco Earthquake And Fire – April 18th, 2006

Almost a century before Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans, one of the worst natural disasters in America's history devastated San Francisco. On April 18, 1906, at 5:12 in the morning, "The Great San Francisco Earthquake" struck, followed by a series of catastrophic fires that burned for three days and destroyed more than 500 blocks in the heart of the city. The earthquake is estimated at 8.25 on the Richter scale and lasted about one minute. In commemoration of this disastrous event, the Census Bureau spotlights how the city has changed.

- **Facts for Features Fact Sheet**

- <http://www.census.gov/Press->

- [Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/006580.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/006580.html)

Read more:

- **1906 Earthquake Centennial Alliance – Teacher Resources:**

- <http://1906centennial.org/teachers/resources/>

- **California Geological Survey:**

- http://www.consrv.ca.gov/cgs/geologic_hazards/earthquakes/SanFrancisco_1906.htm · U.S. Geological Survey: <http://quake.wr.usgs.gov/info/1906/>

- **San Francisco Virtual Museum**

- <http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906/06.html>

- **San Francisco Public Library Historical Photos Collection**

- <http://sfpl.lib.ca.us/librarylocations/sfhistory/eqquake-browse.htm>

- **Before and After Films – Library of Congress**

- <http://rs6.loc.gov/papr/sfhome.html>

- **Facts & Figures: Top 10 Lists and Maps – National Earthquake Information Center**

- <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/eqcenter/top10.php>

Recent Articles from InfoAlert

<http://infoalert.usembassy.de>

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From "The Poem That Changed America: "Howl" Fifty Years Later"

Shinder, Jason (editor)

American Poetry Review, Mar/Apr 2006, v35, #2, p3-10

Allen Ginsberg's Howl is arguably one of the most influential poems in American poetry in the last 50 years: "Celebrated by many writers at the time of its publication, including Jack Kerouac, Denise Levertov, and William Carlos Williams (and dismissed by many critics including Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren), the poem gained national recognition when it became the focus of proceedings brought against it by the San Francisco Juvenile Department for obscenity in 1957. Although the presiding Judge Horn dismissed the charges by quoting the motto, "evil to him who thinks evil," the trial was the beginning of one of the most public and influential poetic journeys of any single poem. The trial, and the publicity it garnered, helped confirm not only the poem's literary and social significance. It also helped to root the poem's opening line (one of the most famous lines of poetry in world literature) in our collective consciousness: 'I have seen the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving, naked, hysterical...' This article presents an excerpt from a recent book. Jason Shinder collected 26 essays that document the poem's stormy reception to the canonical status it enjoys today. As one reviewer said, 'Though everybody gives the poem its due as an American classic, personal reactions dominate, and nearly everyone has a Ginsberg story to tell, even if it's just about being blown away by hearing him read.' This article includes excerpts from selected contributions." Poet Jason Shinder teaches in the graduate Writing Seminars at Bennington College. He is the founder of YMCA National Writer's Voice and Sundance Institute's Arts Writing Program.

<http://infoalert.usembassy.de/02-06/g8.htm>

Fear of Narrative and the Skittery Poem of Our Moment

Hoagland, Tony

Poetry, March 2006, v187, #6, p508-, 14p

Hoagland explains why poetry has become fashionable, celebrated, taught, and learned in the last ten years. He observes that "American poetry has seen a surge in associative and 'experimental' poetries, in a wild variety of forms and orientations. Some of this work has been influenced by theories of literary criticism and epistemology, some by the old Dionysian imperative to jazz things up. The energetic cadres of MFA grads have certainly contributed to this milieu, founding magazines, presses, and aesthetic clusters which encourage and influence each other's experiments. Generally speaking, this time could be characterized as one of great invention and playfulness. Simultaneously, it is also a moment of great aesthetic self-consciousness and emotional removal." Tony Hoagland teaches at the University of Houston and in the Warren Wilson MFA program.

<http://infoalert.usembassy.de/02-06/g9.htm>

"Seeing the Possibilities": Learning From, With, and About Multilingual Classroom Communities

Van Sluys, Katie & Linda D Labbo

Language Arts, March 2006, v83, #4, p321-, 11p

"Come with me, to the quiet minute. ..." These opening words to a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye caught the attention of Sara, a sixth grader, who copied the poem over and over again in her writing notebook. As an Algerian immigrant and new member of an intermediate multiage classroom community, Sara was a quiet newcomer who transformed into a vocal and valued class member over the course of a year..." In this article, the authors explore what is possible when learners become literate by weaving together their resources and engaging in complex, collective and critical literacy learning." Katie Van Sluys is assistant professor of literacy in the Department of Teacher Education at DePaul University in Chicago. Rise Reinier teaches in a multiage classroom at Templeton Elementary School in Bloomington, Indiana.

<http://infoalert.usembassy.de/02-06/g10.htm>

The Great 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

Niderost, Eric. American History, April 2006, online edition

"In the spring of 1906 San Francisco was a city boasting 410,000 inhabitants -- a world-class metropolis whose citizens, at the dawn of a new century, looked forward with a sense of civic pride and growing confidence...The massive earthquake that shook San Francisco to its core in the early hours of April 18, 1906, ignited a howling blaze that threatened total destruction of the city. Action intended to save the city may have added to the chaos, injuries, deaths and damage." The article features more than 10 photos showing the effects of the earthquake on San Francisco.

<http://www.thehistorynet.com/ah/bl-san-francisco-earthquake/>